

'Yeh hai rashmi zulfon ka andhera, na ghabraiye,
jaha tak mehek hai mere gesuon ki, chale aaiye...'

That was an amorous Mumtaaz, complete with figure-hugging ensemble and smouldering look, trying to seduce Biswajit in *Mere Sanam*. But more than anything else, it was the voice that lent the song that undefinable 'come hither' quality. The voice, that for five decades has lent to the otherwise demure Indian heroines, a touch of the naughty. Asha Bhosle, who at 68, continues to sing a raunchy *Kambaqi ishq* for a gyrating Urmila Matondkar in *Pyar Tune Kya Kiya*.

Khayyam, who first recorded a song with her over 50 years ago and recently did the album *Asha and Khayyam*, once said of her: "She has the kind of personality which makes men say, 'I love you'." O P Nayyar, famous for his lilting melodies like *Jaaiye aap kahan jayenge* and *Aao huzur tumko sitaron mein le chalo*, said every time he wrote music it was Asha's voice that popped into his head. No surprise then, that, almost all his numbers were sung by her. He set off quintessential Asha-style in *Naya*



the SU

Still sensual at 68

Daur in 1957 with numbers like *Ude jab jab zulfen teri* and *Mangke saath tumhara*. Years later, Khayyam composed unforgettably seductive numbers like *Dil cheez kya hai, aap meri jaan lijiye* especially for Asha in the Muzzafar Ali classic *Umrao Jaan*, putting her at par with sister Lata's renditions for Kamal Amrohi's *Pakeezah*.

But Asha never wanted to be a playback singer in the first place. Marriage at 14 to a man 20 years older meant finding contentment as a housewife, while big sister Lata hit big time. But it was at husband Ganpatrao Bhosle's prompting that she tried her hand at playback singing in the film *Chunariya*, a 1948 release. And she took to it like fish to water (incidentally, something she cooks to perfection). *Chunariya* was followed by films like *Footpath* and *Naya Daur*, which saw her stock rise among the public.

But the individualist that she is, she had to do something different from Lata *didi* and the others, to create her own space. So Asha struggled and

She's almost touching 70, but Asha Bhosle's voice is still as fresh and fragrant as a dewy rose. And just as romantic. The gifted diva tells Sudeshna Chatterjee how she's kept in tune with the times

Contd on page 2

cheez kya hai of the '80s and the naughty *Janam samjha karo* of the '90s. In spite of the array of young voices, Rangeela needed an Asha. Even when she has only one number like *Dum maro dum* in *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* or *Le gavi le gavi* in *Dil Toh Paagal Hai*, it's the one, which gets instant recall from her adoring public. For that earthy sensuousness, a sultry langour, a gay abandon... that still could not typecast her into a definite mould.

Asha, though her voice rings with the mint-fresh zing of a teenager, is versatile too. Shammi Kapoor once said: "If Rafi saab would not have been there, I would have requested Ashaji to render playback for me. Such is her versatility. She is the best singer who really acts while singing."

But ask about the sensuality that she's come to be associated with and she'll tell you disarmingly, "I don't know what this thing is that everybody talks about. I just get into the skin of the song." It's this indefinable quality that has drawn admirers from all corners of the world, including pop icons like the Backstreet Boys and Boy George. "I get right into the head of the character who is to sing the song. I also make it a point to find out who the actress is."

And this too is vintage Asha — the practical, sensible woman behind all that Jazz! "I still treat each song as my first song. If I do not sing well here, I will not get another song. I still need at least three hours to absorb a song completely. Otherwise it seems like *koi aya, namaskar kiya, chala gaya*."

Not unnaturally, some of the most sensuous numbers in Asha's repertoire were by the late RD Burman, her second husband. Says she, "The marriage was more because of the music than the man. We'd sit up nights listening to music. I'd often end up at recordings in the morning without getting any sleep." Critics point out that

turned 68 yesterday.) And is perhaps the first Indian playback singer to have shared album space with western pop icons like Boy George, Stephen Luscombe and Code Red.

The yellow satin sari and the chiffon robe which she wore in one of her foreign shows are already on display at Planet Hollywood along with her hand prints in clay. She is the first Indian artiste to have won such acclaim three years ago. This, apart from the 12,000 songs she's sung in different Indian languages.

Any mention of that famous sibling rivalry with Lata is promptly dismissed — "We are like any other sisters." Does it mean then that Sai Paranjpe's *Saaz* loosely based on their supposed rivalry is all fiction? "It's *bakwas*. But yes, people behave very differently when we are together. They speak less with me whereas otherwise they would speak nineteen to the dozen."

Then she shows one the innocuous connecting door between her apartment and her sister's. "I have never believed in number games. Mahatma Gandhi *accha hai bolke Nehru ko toh koi gaali nahi deta — agar mein uske jaisi nahi hoon toh woh bhi mere jaise nahi hai* (You don't need to badmouth Nehru to praise Gandhi. If I am not like her, she is also not like me).

What about love? "I am not destined to have a man's love. So whoever came into my life could not make me happy. Even when they left, they made me sadder still. The pain is so intense that it cuts through your entire life. Now I understand, when something is not in your destiny, you should not even try for it."

Yet, life she feels has compensated her, blessed as she is with three children and now grandchildren. Anand, her youngest son, now manages her affairs. Her daughter Varsha is a journalist. Asha was 15 when her first child, Hemant was born. During the '70s and '80s, she sang to his tunes.

After almost 53 years in the industry, she has few regrets. "I was at Borivli (a Mumbai suburb) in the early years of my marriage. Today I travel to San Francisco. I could sing with Boy George and accept MTV awards at Radio City Hall in New York, which is supposed to be the

Mecca of musicians. I feel blessed."

And yes, she would like to be reborn. As the Asha Bhosle minus the mistakes she made in life. "Goodness and death are the only truths in life, as is this moment. I celebrate every moment I live for." For now, she is busy writing her autobiography in Marathi and Hindi.



Wild child Meghana Reddy is now a quieter but stronger person. Priya Pathiyan hangs with her to find that although she claims she's out of the whole social shebang these days, she still has a lot of interesting things happening in her life

She looks 27. That's aptitude of labels people who once a wild child before..."

People hosted the surprised chic preference talk and to discuss a spunk, but people who the people in Mumbai Saraswa

I am not destined to have a man's love

Pancham experimented a lot with her voice and she herself was game for it.

Hence we have songs like, *O mere sona, re, Chura liya* and *Jaane jaan*, sung in what columnist Shobhaa Dé calls a "happy voice — full of mischief, laughter and abandon. At once seductive, enticing and desperately innocent too. When you hear her

Kathm

Samrat Upadhyay brings to life and their everyday lives in his Lisa Tsering that designs o

Maybe it's the Buddhist attitude of non-attachment that lends Samrat Upadhyay's their uniquely straightforward appeal. Nepal's first English-language author to be published in the West, Upadhyay, 38, takes an unsentimental approach to the lovers, civil servants, housewives and other non-glamorous characters who populate the nine short stories in his collection, *Arresting God in Kathmandu*. In the simplicity of his style lies grace.

"I like the lyrical quality of the short story form," Upadhyay says. "It's closer to poetry."